

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1.-7. (Canceled)

8. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 7 36, wherein said handle excludes a spool for containing suture.

9.-16. (Canceled)

17. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim ~~16~~ 36, wherein ~~said the gap~~ exposed surface ranges from about 3/8 to about 3 1/2 inches in length.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim ~~18~~ 36, wherein a transverse cross-section of said handle, relative to a suture ~~or tool advancement~~ movement direction, is generally triangular.

20. (Currently Amended) ~~An~~ The surgical apparatus ~~for receiving and passing one or more sutures, one or more tools, and combinations thereof, comprising:~~

~~a handle; and~~
~~a cannula mounted on said handle;~~
in accordance with claim 36 wherein the said handle having a
exposed surface comprises a platform for slidingly advancing
moving suture into said cannula;
~~wherein said cannula is aligned with said surface.~~
in the directions.

21. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein advancing the moving of suture is achieved with a thumb or finger.

22. (Canceled)

23. (Currently Amended) ~~An~~ The apparatus ~~for receiving and~~
~~passing one or more sutures, one or more tools, and combinations~~
~~thereof, comprising:~~

~~a cannula having a distal end;~~
in accordance with claim 36 wherein at least a portion of
said the distal end of said cannula is configured to drive a
suture against tissue without severing the suture.

24.-30. (Canceled)

31. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim ~~30~~ 39, wherein the ~~one or more tools~~ puller assembly is a loop retriever;

~~said gap~~ the exposed surface permitting the loop retriever shaft to be articulated ~~from~~ between a retracted position wherein said loop retriever is retained in said cannula, and an advanced position wherein said loop retriever ~~may receive~~ is connectable to the suture.

32. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim ~~30~~ 39, wherein the ~~one or more tools~~ puller assembly is a hook retriever;

~~said gap~~ the exposed surface permitting the hook retriever shaft to be articulated ~~from~~ between a retracted position wherein said loop retriever is retained in said cannula, and an advanced position wherein said hook retriever ~~may receive~~ is connectable to the suture.

33.-35. (Canceled)

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36. (New) A surgical apparatus for delivering and retrieving suture, the apparatus comprising:

a cannula having a distal end and a proximal end, and a lumen extending therebetween; and

a handle having a distal end and a proximal end, a passageway extending through at least a portion of said handle, and an exposed surface disposed between the passageway and the distal end of said handle;

the proximal end of said cannula being attached to said handle, with the lumen of said cannula being in communication with the exposed surface of said handle;

wherein the exposed surface is adapted to support a suture extending through said handle such that the suture is manually engageable by an operator for freely moving the suture selectively in the direction of the handle distal end and in the direction of the handle proximal end.

37. (New) The surgical apparatus in accordance with claim 36, wherein said passageway is provided with an opening at the handle proximal end, and wherein the opening is unobstructed.

38. (New) A surgical apparatus for delivering and retrieving suture, the apparatus comprising:

a passer assembly and a puller assembly;

said passer assembly comprising:

a handle and a cannula;

said handle comprising an elongated body having

(i) a passageway extending distally from a suture entryway axially disposed at a proximal end portion of said body, (ii) a recess in said body defining a surface generally extending along an axis of the passageway and disposed proximate a distal end of said body, and (iii) a nose portion extending distally of said recess and defining a bore in communication with the passageway and the recess planar surface; and

said cannula comprising an elongated tubular member defining a lumen, a proximal end of said cannula being disposed in said nose portion of said body, the lumen being in alignment with the bore of the nose portion; and

said puller assembly comprising:

a shaft; and

a suture engager disposed on a distal end of said shaft, said shaft and said suture engager being moveable through the suture entryway, the body passageway, across the recess

planar surface, through the nose portion bore and through the cannula lumen, distally to connect said suture engager to a suture and proximally to withdraw said suture engager and the connected suture.

39. (New) The surgical apparatus in accordance with claim 38 wherein the planar surface is adapted to support a selected one of a suture extending through said handle and said puller assembly shaft extending through said handle, such that the suture and said puller assembly shaft are each manually engageable by an operator for moving the suture and said puller assembly shaft selectively in the direction of the nose portion and the cannula, and in the direction of the body proximal end portion for rearward movement of the puller assembly and suture out the axially disposed passageway at the proximal end of the body.